

Message Text

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ACTION H-02

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

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E.O. 11652: N/A (DECONTROL ON DELIVERY TO RECIPIENT OF LETTER)

TAGS: SREF SY

SUBJ: ANSWER TO LETTER FROM SENATOR BROCK TO AMBASSADOR
RE SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

1. REQUEST DEPARTMENT FURNISH SENATOR BROCK
FOLLOWING REPLY FROM AMBASSADOR TO SENATOR'S
LETTER OF JANUARY 5.

2. DEAR SENATOR BROCK:

I THANK YOU FOR YOUR JANUARY 5 LETTER AND
AM ASKING THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE TO FORWARD
TO YOU THIS TELEGRAPHIC REPLY OWING TO
RECENT DELAYS IN EXCHANGING CORRESPONDENCE
THROUGH OUR DIPLOMATIC POUCH. (THE SIGNED ORIGINAL
OF THIS LETTER WILL FOLLOW BY POUCH). I RECALL WITH PLEASURE
OUR BRIEF MEETING OF LAST JUNE AT THE SENATE
OFFICE BUILDING AND HOPE TO HAVE THE PLEASURE
OF SEEING YOU AGAIN WHETHER HERE OR IN WASHINGTON.
MEANWHILE, I WELCOME THE CHANCE TO SHARE WITH
YOU MY ASSESSMENT OF THE PRESENT SITUATION
OF THE SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY AND WHAT CAN
BE DONE ON THE ISSUES OF REUNIFICATION WITH
RELATIVES IN THE UNITED STATES AND FREE
EMIGRATION.

BY ALL MEASURES, THE CONDITIONS OF THE JEWISH
COMMUNITY HAVE IMPROVED OVER THOSE OF THE
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PAST DECADE. THERE IS EVIDENCE THAT THEY ARE

CONTINUING TO IMPROVE. AMERICAN AND OTHER JOURNALISTS HAVE IN THE PAST TWO YEARS SPENT SOME TIME IN SYRIA TRYING TO LEARN THE SITUATION IN DEPTH, SOME VERY RECENTLY. THEIR CONSISTENT CONCLUSION WAS THAT THE STATE OF DAILY LIFE FOR THE COMMUNITY HAD BEEN GETTING BETTER.

WE DO NOT RELY, OF COURSE, ON THE EVALUATIONS OF VISITING JOURNALISTS ALONE. THE STAFF OF THE EMBASSY AND I HAVE DEDICATED CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION TO ANSWERING QUESTIONS RECEIVED FROM AMERICA FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE WELFARE OF INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY. WE HAVE WORKED HARD TO KEEP OURSELVES INFORMED OF DEVELOPMENTS RELATING TO THE COMMUNITY'S STATUS. I HAVE RELIABLE INFORMATION THAT PASSPORTS ARE BEING GRANTED TO SYRIAN JEWS FOR BUSINESS VISITS ABROAD, FOR MEDICAL CARE, AS WELL AS FOR TOURISM. THEY ARE REQUIRED TO POST BOND IN EACH CASE AS AN EARNEST OF THEIR INTENT TO RETURN. WE HAVE ISSUED SOME VISAS TO SYRIAN JEWS TO TRAVEL TO THE US ON BUSINESS AND FAMILY VISITS DURING THE PAST YEAR.

IT IS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT OTHER MINORITY GROUPS IN SYRIA HAVE BEEN PLEASED WITH THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT'S ATTITUDES TOWARD MINORITIES GENERALLY FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS; CHANGES THAT AFFECT OTHER MINORITY GROUPS POSITIVELY ARE LIKELY TO HAVE THEIR EFFECT ON THE SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY AS WELL. AT THE SAME TIME, I AM CONVINCED THAT OUR KNOWN CONTINUING INTEREST AND QUIET EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN HAVE HELPED THE COMMUNITY'S STATUS WITHIN SYRIA. PRESIDENT ASAD STATED LAST YEAR THAT THE SYRIAN LEADERSHIP WAS SYMPATHETIC ON HUMANITARIAN GROUNDS TO THE CONCERNS OF FAMILIES LONG SEPARATED.

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HE HAS GIVEN HIS PERSONAL ASSURANCE THAT FORMER SYRIAN JEWS WHO ARE NOW AMERICANS WOULD BE WELCOME BACK HERE ON FAMILY VISITS.

NEVERTHELESS, THE FUTURE OF SYRIAN JEWS IS LARGELY CAUGHT UP IN THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT. MY ANALYSIS IS THAT THE DOORS FOR REUNIFICATION AND FREE EMIGRATION OF THE SYRIAN JEWS WILL

FULLY OPEN ONLY IN A SITUATION OF OVERALL
MIDDLE EASTERN PEACE. I DO NOT RULE OUT THE
POSSIBILITY OF INTERIM PROGRESS, PARTICULARLY
FOR INDIVIDUAL CASES OF REUNIFICATION AS THE
PEACE PROCESS MOVES FORWARD, BUT I WOULD NOT
MISLEAD YOU BY PRETENDING TO PREDICT A TIME FRAME.

YOU WILL KNOW THE DEDICATION OF SUCCESSIVE-
AMERICAN ADMINISTRATIONS TO THE CAUSE OF
SECURING A MID-EAST PEACE. PERHAPS YOU SHARE
MY EVALUATION THAT DEVELOPMENTS OVER THE PAST
TWO YEARS HAVE BEEN PARTICULARLY POSITIVE AND
PROMISE FURTHER PROGRESS IN THE FUTURE. WE
ARE BENDING EVERY EFFORT TO BRING ABOUT A
SETTLEMENT THROUGH A PROCESS OF NEGOTIATION.
SYRIA IS ONE OF THE KEY STATES IN THIS
NEGOTIATION.

I UNDERSTAND YOUR POINT ABOUT THE INTEREST OF CONGRESS
IN SCRUTINIZING THE PROPOSED AID PROGRAM FOR SYRIA

CAREFULLY IN THE CONTEXT OF CONCERN FOR THE FUTURE OF
THE SYRIAN JEWS. THERE ARE TWO WAYS IN WHICH THE
UNITED STATES CAN ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF THE SYRIAN
JEWS. ONE IS TO BRING ABOUT A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN
OUR TWO GOVERNMENTS. THE OTHER IS TO TRY TO ALLEVIATE
THE PROBLEM WITH MEANS WE JUDGE MOST EFFECTIVE, WHICH
IN THIS CASE INVOLVES THE USE OF QUIET DIPLOMACY TO
CREATE CONDITIONS WITHIN WHICH THE POLICIES IN
QUESTION CAN BE CHANGED. WE SETTLED ON THE LATTER
COURSE BECAUSE EXPERIENCE HAS SHOWN US THAT CONFRON-
TATION WOULD PRODUCE RESULTS THAT ARE THE OPPOSITE
OF THOSE SOUGHT, AND COULD HARM THOSE WHO HAVE THE MOST
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AT STAKE.

A CONFRONTATION APPROACH -- SUCH AS ELIMINATING OR
THREATENING TO CUT ECO-
NOMIC ASSISTANCE TO SYRIA --
WOULD NOT USEFULLY INFLUENCE SYRIA'S POLICY TOWARD ITS
JEWISH COMMUNITY, REGARDLESS OF SYRIAN HOPES FOR MORE
RAPID ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. IT WOULD CERTAINLY
RISK HARMING OUR PEACE EFFORTS, WITH THEIR LONG-RUN
PROMISE FOR THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN SYRIA, WITHOUT IN
ITSELF OFFERING ANY POSSIBILITY OF IMPROVING THE WELL-
BEING OF THIS COMMUNITY.

WITH BEST PERSONAL REGARDS,

RICHARD W. MURPHY
AMERICAN AMBASSADOR
MURPHY

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